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ABSTRACT

This paper reports preliminary results of two models of school reform initiated in Texas during the summer of 1997. The Texas Accelerated Schools Model began with an intense 5-day training of school teams from schools that had completed a "buy-in" process, along with their external coach, The Schoolwide Planning Summer Institutes began with an intense 2-day planning institute in which school teams collaborated with support teams to design plans for school reform that would incorporate federal, local, and district expectations for school reform. Additional support was available as needed. The study involved collecting data from participants throughout the process in sites that included schoolwide Title I programs, rural, urban, and suburban schools at elementary, middle, and high school levels. Participants included teachers, parents, principals, and other administrators. Study findings indicate the importance of participation by the school principal and the usefulness of including a central office administrator in the school team. Also important was providing definite times and places for school teams to work together. Effective teams viewed their coach or support team member as a source of information and support, not as someone to dictate reforms. A comparison of the weekly and as-needed forms of support suggests that the weekly coach was more likely to be considered an integral part of the reform effort. While both collaborative models were effective in developing relationships, creating teams, and assisting those teams to develop plans, the intensity of the training provided by the Accelerated Schools model and the weekly followup support enabled those teams to address their issues in greater depth and to move forward more smoothly. (Contains 14 references.) (SLD)

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Collaborative Models to Promote Equity and Excellence for All Children

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The STAR (Support for Texas Academic Renewal) Center

USDE Region VIII Comprehensive Center

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Collaborative Models to Promote Equity and Excellence for All Children

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Background

Title I Schoolwide Programs

The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 initiated a massive change in the manner in which schools use their Title I and other federal resources. The Act encourages schools to engage in extensive planning efforts to use all of their state, local and federal resources to reform the whole school. This change in federal law encouraged educators throughout the nation to engage in schoolwide reform efforts aimed at assuring that all students will meet challenging high standards for academic achievement. In support of reform efforts, the Improving America's Schools Act required each state to establish a system of school support teams composed of teachers, pupil services personnel, representatives of organizations knowledgeable about successful schoolwide projects or comprehensive school reform, distinguished educators, and other persons who are knowledgeable about research and practice on teaching and learning, particularly about strategies for improving the educational opportunities for low-achieving students. States have responded the school support team requirement in different ways, ranging from selecting exemplary schools or districts to serve as mentors to other schools, to employing carefully selected and trained distinguished educators for a period of one to two years to provide coaching to school teams. The school support system in Texas has been decentralized to the 20 regional education service centers. Each center has implemented a system of school support that responds to the strengths and needs of the schools in that region. School support coordinators have provided team members training for their role of school support. School support team interaction with schools

varies greatly. Some teams visit schools one or more times a year, others serve as resources on an as-needed basis, some provide for one or two team members to participate in campus planning efforts, some have established no consistent interactions.

Comprehensive School Reform

The schoolwide reform effort was enhanced with the passage of the Comprehensive School Reform legislation in 1997 (H.R. 2264). This legislation provides seed money to support schools in adopting research-based school reform models which must contain the following nine components:

1. Employ innovative strategies and proven methods for student learning based on reliable research and effective practices and have been replicated successfully in schools with diverse characteristics;
2. Have a comprehensive design that aligns the school's curriculum, technology, and professional development in a schoolwide reform plan designed to enable all students to meet challenging state content and performance standards and address needs identified through a school needs assessment;
3. Provide high-quality and continuous teacher and staff professional development and training;
4. Have measurable goals for student performance and benchmarks for meeting those goals;
5. Are supported by school faculty, administrators and staff;
6. Provide for the meaningful involvement of parents and the local community in planning and implementing school improvement activities;
7. Utilize high quality external technical support from a comprehensive school reform entity (which may be a university with experience or expertise in schoolwide reform);

8. Include a plan for evaluating the implementation of school reforms and the student achievement results achieved; and
9. Identify how other resources (federal/state/local/private) available to the school will be utilized to coordinate services to support and sustain the school reform effort.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to report preliminary results of two models of school reform initiated in Texas during the summer of 1997. The Texas Accelerated Schools model began with an intense five-day training of school teams from schools that had completed a "buy-in" process, along with their external coach, in the Accelerated Schools process of school reform, five further trainings during the school year and one day a week support from their coach at the school site. Coaches also receive regular mentoring and training from the Texas Center for Accelerated Schools. The Schoolwide Planning Summer Institutes began with an intense two-day planning institute in which school teams collaborated with their school support teams to design plans for school reform that would meet federal, local school and district expectations, to be followed by support from their school support team on an as-needed basis

Theoretical Framework

"The basic problem is that fundamental education change is even more difficult, complex, and controversial than the change literature has acknowledged so far. This literature has dealt relatively well with the technical aspects of educational change; how to build peoples' capacity to implement change, how to create strong professional cultures so that teachers can support and learn from one another in their change efforts....and so on. But, with a few exceptions (for

example, Saracen 1990) three areas of teaching, learning, and leadership have been given little attention by this literature. These are the passion, purpose, and politics of change" (Hargraves et al, 1997, p. ix).

A review of the literature also points out that successful improvement efforts have been site-based and with commitment from all stakeholders to the vision, goals and objectives determined at the site.

"Goals give teamwork meaning." Gene Maeroff (1993) writes that "teams are vehicles for increasing efficiency, effectiveness, and motivation." When asked what motivates and energizes effective teams, he states, "A clear, elevating goal and a results-driven structure."

In a study of successful school restructuring, Newman and Wehlage (1995) found that there are four key factors necessary for successful school restructuring. The factors are: 1. Student Learning; 2. Authentic Pedagogy; 3. School Organizational Capacity; and 4. External Support. They concluded that to promote learning of high intellectual quality, a school must build the capacity of its staff to work well as a unit. One of the ways to build this capacity is through the purposeful use of external support agents. "External agencies can help schools to focus on student learning and enhance organizational capacity through three strategies: 1. Setting standards for learning of high intellectual quality; 2. Providing sustained, schoolwide staff development; and 3. Using deregulation to increase school autonomy." What made a difference, as measured by both newer standards of performance as well traditional achievement tests, was building vibrant internal learning communities with the two-way relationships with external networks. They also found that successful schools focused on "authentic pedagogy and student learning in a collaborative process." They cautioned, however, "that sometimes external influences pull

schools in different directions, impose unreasonable regulations, and instigate rapid shifts in policy and leadership, all of which can undermine organizational capacity."

Dr. Nancy Kraft (1992), Consultant for the School Evaluation Services, University of Wisconsin-Madison, in a paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Meeting, identified the factors that were critical to ensure success for school improvement. Her paper was based on an evaluation of a model that encouraged and promoted teacher-directed school improvement processes. Factors stated were: (1) Teachers must have key leadership roles in effecting school; (2) Teachers need to be given the necessary time and support to engage in critical reflection of their programs and practices; (3) A consortium effort stressing interactive participation and networking between the membership is effective; and (4) Professional outside assistance is critical....use of external assistance helps fill the void existing in how teachers are traditionally prepared."

Methods, Techniques, Data Sources

This study involved collecting data from participants throughout the process. School sites included schoolwide Title I programs, rural, urban and suburban schools; elementary, middle, and high schools. Participants included teachers, parents, principals, other administrators, Region Education Service Center Staff, and Comprehensive Center Staff. Variable indicators for successful planning and implementing were used, including a Tool Kit document that assesses if the intent and guideline provided by federal, state and district are being met.

Questions guiding this study include:

- Who needs to participate in schoolwide planning?

- How can a school planning for improvement meet the intent of federal, state and district requirements?
- What factors enhance or challenge educational reforms efforts? How can they be addressed through a collaborative process?
- How important are relationships to sustained change efforts? What is the role of the external support agent in planning, implementing and sustaining school improvement?
- How does a campus best utilize its Title I required school support team or Accelerated Schools coach?
- What information and data do school teams and their external agents need to have in order to plan effectively?
- How does the once-a-week support of a coach compare to the as-needed model of school support?
- How does the use of a trained coach compare to the use of trained school support teams?
- What do school support team members and Accelerated Schools coaches need to know and be able to do in order to support the schoolwide planning process?

Educational Importance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides a foundation and knowledge base for understanding the kinds and intensity of support that are necessary to accomplish lasting school reform. It also informs on the processes required to build a school community that has first-hand experience in decision making processes based on building relationships in a collaborative environment.

Responses to Guiding Questions

Who needs to participate in schoolwide planning?

Federal and most state guidelines identify the minimum composition of school improvement teams. Federal requirements, PL 103-382, Sec. 1114 (b) (2) (C)(ii) states that the (Schoolwide) plan must be developed with the involvement of the community to be served and individuals who will carry out such plan, including teachers, principals, other staff and, where appropriate, pupil services personnel, and parents, and, if the plan is related to a secondary school, students from such school. Texas requirements as stated in TEC Sec/ 26.001 (a) state: "Parents are partners with educators, administrators, and school district boards of trustees in their children's education. Parents shall be encouraged to actively participate in creating and implementing education programs for their children." TEC 11.251 (e) states "At least two-thirds of the elected professional staff representatives must be classroom teachers. The remaining staff representatives shall include both campus-and district-level professional staff members." TEC 11.251 (b) requires that "The committees shall include business representatives."

What we learned:

- The school principal must participate in the planning. The principal must assure the team that administrative support will be provided for plans they make.
- School teams that included a central office administrator were able to receive immediate endorsement of plans, particularly those that required district resources. This enabled them to proceed with the planning process without having to wait for approval of the allocation of district resources.

- Site-based teams almost always have new members who are not knowledgeable about effective teamwork, planning processes, data analysis, federal, state and local requirements, budgeting, and other skills needed for effective planning. Training should be routinely provided for new team members to enable them to contribute to the planning process more effectively.
- There were unexpected benefits resulting from the inclusion of community representatives and parents on teams. For example, one team included a local business owner who had previously been very critical of the school. After spending time with the team in planning, he became an advocate for the school with a greater knowledge of the issues they were addressing. Another team included a parent who mobilized other parents to supervise classes so that the teachers on the team could continue to meet on a regular basis to continue school improvement planning.

How can a school planning for improvement meet the intent of federal, state and district requirements?

Schools who are successful in the improvement process consider federal, state and district requirements in a consolidated, organized, and flexible process that focuses on the high academic achievement for all students. This process should serve to strengthen the capacity of all stakeholders to collaborate and coordinate the educational efforts, based on the requirements, to meet the multiple and diverse needs of all students. The comprehensive planning process provides numerous opportunities for the school community to engage in the ongoing planning and implementation of school improvement strategies. In a 1996 study of successful Texas schools, researchers found that these schools had a shared vision for the academic success of

every student. This sense of mission was articulated in every aspect of their planning, organization and use of resources.

What we learned:

- Some school teams were unaware that they could combine their federally required schoolwide plan with their state required campus improvement plan. Training in developing one comprehensive plan for a school should be provided to all teams. A Toolkit for Assessing and Revising the Integrated Campus Improvement and Title I Schoolwide Plan (1997) was used for this training.

What factors enhance or challenge educational reforms efforts? How can they be addressed through a collaborative process?

The US Department of Education's 1994 "Idea Book" on Schoolwide Programs identified challenges that may stand in the way of school improvement and reform efforts such as: allowing adequate time for school staff to learn new roles; developing teachers' capacity to design curriculum and assess student learning; maintaining open communication among planners and members of the school community; cultivating support and active involvement from local business and organizations; and coping with turnover in school leadership.

What we learned:

- Responding to a survey, one principal who participated in the Summer Schoolwide Institute said, "By far, the most valuable service was providing a "structure" or "requirement" that gave this particular group the opportunity to spend this amount of time together with no other agenda or interruptions.....The fellowship and quality time created a feeling of unity that has supported us throughout this year. A very important part of the cohesiveness we

have developed derived from having a common language/vocabulary and research/information base that was provided through the Institute." On the other hand, that same principal said, "No follow up has occurred and I was very disappointed in that regard. I was under the impression that there was going to be a "long-term" close and personal relationship established with some people who were interested in 'action research.'"

- Coaches or support team members serving as facilitators help keep teams on track during intensive training. External facilitators help team members to examine the school culture, expectations, curriculum, instruction and organization at their school.
- Coaches or support teams enable school teams to develop and focus on their goals more consistently.
- Coaches and support team members who understand the analysis and use of data can support school teams in learning to analyze and use data to make informed decisions.

How important are relationships to sustained change efforts? What is the role of the external support agent in planning, implementing and sustaining school improvements?

Educational change is at best, difficult, complex, and controversial. Andy Hargraves (1997) states that literature "has dealt relatively well with the technical aspects of educational change: how to create strong professional cultures so that teachers can support and learn from one another in their change efforts, how to manipulate structures of scheduling and decision making....but with only a few exceptions three areas of teaching, learning, and leadership have been given little attention by this literature. These are the passion, purpose, and politics of change". Hargraves goes on to write, "...change efforts have been occupied with skills and standards that they have not gotten to the heart of what a great deal of teaching (and collaboration) is about: establishing

bonds and forming relationships." Roland Barth (1990) writes, "Schools have the capacity to improve themselves, if the conditions are right. A major responsibility of those outside the schools is to help provide these conditions for those inside. ...What needs to be improved about schools is their culture, the quality of interpersonal relationships and the nature and quality of learning experiences. School improvement is an effort to determine and provide, from without and within, conditions under which the adults and youngsters who inhabit schools will promote and sustain learning among themselves."

Fullan (1996), states that the fundamental problems of education are (1) the growing and deepening alienation among teachers; (2) the balkanization and burnout of passionate reform-minded teachers; and (3) the overwhelming multiplicity of unconnected, fragmented change initiatives. He believes that it is easy to be pessimistic about education reform. There are many legitimate reasons to be discouraged. From the rational-technical point of view, the conclusion that large-scale reform is a hopeless proposition seems justified. However, he argues that the emotional side of change has been either ignored or miscast. By examining emotions and change from a different perspective, we not only gain insights about the dynamics of change, but we also find new understanding of how to make change work more constructively. The moral and the technical begin to fuse, instead of being two ships passing in the night.

With commitment, sustained creative effort and a supportive learning environment, these challenges can be overcome. Professional development serves as a successful vehicle to sustain the school improvement efforts. Federal regulations include a provision for professional development for teachers, aides, and where appropriate, pupil services personnel, parents,

principals and other staff. Most states also have requirements or guidelines that address staff development opportunities for all stakeholders.

What we learned:

- As team members worked together, explored issues and studied research, they began to operate as a team. The task of developing a plan for improvement resulted in diverse members beginning to think of themselves as a team.
- Readings assigned prior to the intensive training, such as Improving Schools from Within, by Roland Barth, help to establish a collaborative climate for the teams.
- Readings assigned during the intensive training, such as What's Worth Fighting For in Your School, by Fullan and Hargraves, help team members to retain a sense of responsibility for school improvement, and keep the focus on using research to make decisions.

How does a campus best utilize their Title I required school support team or Accelerated Schools coach?

Federal requirement, PL 103-382, Sec. 1114 (a)(2), requires that the Schoolwide Plan is to be developed in consultation with the district and its school support team or other technical assistance provider. The intent of this requirement is to provide support for school improvement teams as they grapple with educational change in response to wide-ranging educational reform. Support for school improvement is provided by school support teams that are composed of practitioners, distinguished educators, experts in specific fields, and other technical assistance providers.

Research reveals certain principles about effective technical assistance.(STAR Center, 1996). Effective technical assistance:

- works with systems;
- helps clients identify problems and find solutions;
- values diversity, equity, and access;
- uses what is known about how adults learn;
- builds capacity;
- translates policy into effective practice;
- uses varied service delivery strategies;
- recognizes challenges associated with ongoing growth and change; and
- is cost effective.

What we Learned:

- Trust must be established between the coach or school support team member and school staffs. School teams must have the assurance that their issues and discussions will be kept in confidence.
- School teams that effectively use their coach or support team member view them a source of information, as someone who will support, but not dictate, their efforts.
- School teams that work with their coach or support team members to establish regular follow-up on decisions and activities are able to better stay on track.

What information and data do school teams and their external agents need to have in order to plan effectively?

To plan effectively, school teams and their external agents need comprehensive information and data. Developing key performance indicators is a viable and effective way of building a comprehensive picture of the school and its people. Data should reflect assessment, tracking, communicating and reporting. Data organization, collection of data, analysis of data, and disaggregation of data should provide a framework for learning from the data. Data should include school, student, and program profiles; school and district surveys collected from all stakeholders; and provisions for decision making tools such as action research and self-studies in the development of school plans. Data gathering and analysis should result in a thorough understanding of the school demographics and a profile that responds to "Who are we? Who are the students in our school? How well do our students achieve? What is the size of our school? Who are our teachers? What are our programs? What is our community?" The next step should include questions such as "How do we and others feel about our school and programs? Are our parents satisfied? Our internal customers? Our community? To what extent is the staff comfortable with the amount and rate of change?" The third step would address the question, "How do we compare where we are with where we want to be?" And finally the fourth step, "What actions, decisions, and choices will we make?"

What we learned:

- At a minimum, school teams need student achievement data. These data can then be used to ask the critical questions that will determine what further data are needed.

- Generally, the schools did not make use of all of the data they had access to.
- Many team members needed assistance in learning how to analyze and interpret data. They also need assistance in understanding what disaggregated data can tell them.
- The way in which data are presented to school teams can be intimidating to them. Coaches and support team members can help "demystify" the data, and assist in presenting data in a "user friendly" manner.

How does the once-a-week support of a coach compare to the as-needed model of school support?

Levin (1994), conducted follow-up studies of Accelerated Schools. These original models called for training a school team in the Accelerated Schools processes. Teams were then to "launch" their schools. Conclusions from these follow-up studies resulted in the National Center for Accelerated Schools making the following recommendations for effective school reform:

- Schools need a highly-trained local coach to work with them on a regular basis rather than one-shot training of a school team.
- Training, subsequent mentorship and certification of coaches should be integrated into a systematic training model.
- All members of the school, and parent and community representatives, need to share in the entire experience of transforming their school. Training a team and expecting that team to lead a school in reform efforts, has not been consistently effective.
- The "buy-in" of a large majority of the school is essential to school reform.

- Training activities for coaches and school staffs should model the same principles that teachers are expected to use with their students; active, hands-on, constructivist learning activities.

What we learned:

- In a survey of schools who have an Accelerated Schools coach, seven out of eight respondents stated that they would not be as far along in implementation of the school reform effort without the assistance of a coach. One principal stated: "Our coach is there weekly, offering us a 'shot in the Accelerated Schools process.' a wonderful weekly renewal of our commitment to our strive for excellence!" Another said, "[The] implementation is systematic and planned, ongoing and it is not getting lost or pushed back."
- In response to the question "Have you received any follow-up support as a result of the Institute?" included in a survey of schools who participated in the Schoolwide Summer Institutes, one principal said, "No, it has not been requested at this time." Another said, "No; I thought we would be developing 'teams', but I don't remember getting any more information on that training." When asked if they have used any materials or ideas presented during the Institute, one principal said, "The strategies will be used in April when we revisit, as a school, our campus improvement plan." We interpreted this statement to mean that the plan had not been used or reviewed since it was developed at the Institute.

How does the use of a trained coach compare to the use of trained school support teams?

In States Supporting Schools, A Status Report on Implementation of Statewide Systems of School Support Under the Improving America's Schools Act (1997), the authors found that in some states distinguished educators serving as members of school support teams receive

extensive training and work on a full time basis for a specified period of one to two years, often providing intensive and sustained support to schools on an individual basis; i.e. serving as coaches. The Texas model of school support, however, usually consists of one to two visits by a volunteer team during a school year. The team provides support and assistance for planning, helps to determine other assistance needed and to identify appropriate deliverers of that assistance. The Schoolwide Planning Institutes included provisions for follow-up assistance on an as-needed basis.

What we learned:

- While any assistance to a struggling school is helpful, Hargraves et al (1997) found "The basic problem is that fundamental education change is even more difficult, complex, and controversial than the change literature has acknowledged so far." This has been confirmed in our work with schools undergoing reform efforts.
- Whether they are a coach or a school support team member, the intensity of the assistance appears to be more important than the title of the person delivering the assistance to the school.
- The question really should have been "How can a trained coach or school support team provide the intensive assistance that is needed to assist a school in its reform efforts?"

What do school support team members and Accelerated Schools coaches need to know and be able to do in order to support the schoolwide planning process?

This description of the knowledge and skills of coaches was found in an Accelerated School Newsletter: "Becoming an accelerated school is neither simple nor easy. The same is true for becoming an accelerated school coach. In both cases, new ways of thinking, seeing, and practicing

must be learned, and the process of change takes time. In both cases, the responsibility is placed upon the school and the coach to create activities in which important values and lessons are embedded and which enable participants to construct their own understandings of issues, processes, challenges, and solutions.".

Ginsberg, Johnson and Moffett (1997) provide some suggestions of topics for training for school support team members. They include: creating a clear sense of purpose; understanding the potential of teams to influence school change; understanding school support teams in relation to other models or networks; positively influencing teaching and learning throughout the entire school; knowing what works and what doesn't work in school reform; developing a collective philosophy for working effectively with schools; developing approaches to establishing trustful relationships between school support teams and schools; developing approaches to assist schools in devising or further considering challenging visions of high student performance; developing thoughtful questions to help schools consider options and rigorously test their assumptions, ideas, and hypotheses; developing approaches to enhance schools' commitments and capacity to oversee their own change processes--so that over time the role of the school support team diminishes; respecting the school as the locus of control for decision making; identifying success; and customizing the model to meet the needs of the school.

What we learned:

- Although knowledge of the change process is crucial, coaches and school support team members absolutely must establish a relationship based on mutual respect and trust with the school.

- Coaches and school support team members must be flexible enough to start the process at the level of the school team's knowledge and ability. They must be adept at identifying the information needed to make good decisions.
- Coaches and school support team members need to retain their vision of high academic achievement for all students. They should want every school to be the kind of school they would want for their own child.
- Coaches and school support team members should ask lots of questions and provide few answers; their role is to support the school in doing its own work.

Discussion and Implications

The results of this study confirmed the findings of Hargraves (1997) that school reform is a complex process. It also confirmed that the principles of effective technical assistance (STAR Center 1996) do apply to school reform efforts. Whereas both collaborative models were effective in developing relationships, creating teams and assisting those teams in developing plans for their reform efforts, the intensity of the trainings provided by the Accelerated Schools model enabled those teams to address their issues in much greater depth. and the weekly follow-up support provided by the trained coaches was what kept these schools on track and moving toward their goal for school reform.

As the 1997 legislation for Comprehensive School Reform is implemented, there is a need to continually assess the kinds and intensity of support that schools need to reform themselves effectively.

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